



Samuel Untermyer, who called for a "holy war" against Germany in 1933

Unity in Dispersion

A History of the World Jewish Congress and particularly, the Jewish influence on the Roosevelt Presidency and the Origins of WWII

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In order to emphasize the documentary character of this publication, we left largely without commentary our examination of the very important document on the World Jewish Congress (WJC) *Unity in Dispersion, a History of the WJC*, published in New York in 1948.

The WJC is a permanent world organization. It has, conforming to its aim, attempted to influence, and, in fact, has exercised enormous influence on world politics. It has shaped the destiny of mankind ever since its inception in 1936, although it does not even represent a national entity within the meaning of international law. An objective historiography must therefore take notice of this influence and its consequences.

Following a brief review of the beginnings of international collaboration, the book begins with the First Zionist Congress in Basle in 1897, at which two different objectives were set:

1. The creation of a Jewish state in Palestine;
2. Joint efforts to improve the living conditions of Jews living in the "Diaspora," i.e. outside Palestine.

At the Zionist Conference convened in Carlsbad in 1922 it emerged that, in addition to the Zionist Organization which was increasingly engaged with Palestine-related tasks, a Jewish world organization should be created to take care of problems in terms of world politics. In 1932 the first preparative conference of the World Jewish Conference was convened in Geneva, but the essential preconditions for this meeting had already been fulfilled during World War One by the efforts and unification of the Jews, predominantly in the United

States. These had assumed leadership in the representation of worldwide Jewish interests as early as 1919 in Versailles.

'The Jews took an active part in the constitution of many of these new nations, but they were also concerned with securing their own recognition as a national minority' (pp. 23-24).

'By the time the Peace Conference assembled in Paris at the beginning of 1919, a great number of Jewish delegations from many lands had found their way to the French capital. It became clear to responsible Jewish statesmen that their first task was to coordinate the activities of these delegations.

'On March 25, 1919, a Comite des Delegations Juives aupres de la Conference de la Paix (Conference of Jewish Delegations at the Peace Conference) was formed, composed of delegations from Palestine, the United States, Canada, Russia, the Ukraine, Poland, East Galicia, Rumania, Transylvania, Bukovina, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Yugoslavia, and Greece, speaking in the name of democratically elected Jewish Congress, National Jewish Councils, or federated Jewish communities. In addition, the World Zionist Organization and the B'nai B'rith were represented on the Comite. The Comite des Delegations Juives thus rightly claimed to be the spokesmen of over ten million Jews' (p. 26).

'The work of the Comite des Delegations Juives was crowned with a substantial measure of success' (p. 26).

These measures included:

- a) The protection of the rights of minorities;
- b) Influence on international law to restrict the sovereignty of a state.

This obviously referred primarily to Germany, even if she is not explicitly mentioned, for it was only with reference to Germany that one could possibly define such endeavors as having been "crowned with success." For instance, the provisions governing the rights of minorities that were imposed on Poland (which she never complied with) were at no time regarded as a restriction of the rights of sovereignty by Poland, as has been proven by Warsaw's politics during the years from 1919 to 1939. This is also valid for Czechoslovakia and Lithuania (here with reference to the German Memel territory).

When the Versailles 'peace conference' was drawing to an end, the committee did not disband. Instead, it decided to continue its work as a permanent panel under the chairmanship of Dr. Leo Motzkin (p. 27). In this manner, great influence was exercised within the Interparliamentary Union, at International Minority Congresses, and on the panels of the League of Nations (p. 28).

Dr. Nahum Goldmann convened the first preparative World Jewish Conference in Geneva, on behalf of the American Jewish Congress. It took place on 14-17 August 1932. The Zentralverein Deutscher Staatsbuerger Juedischen Glaubens (Central Association of German Nationals of Jewish Faith) and a number of other organizations refused to participate in this conference.

The purpose of the WJC was defined by Dr. Nahum Goldmann as follows:

'It is to establish the permanent address of the Jewish people; amidst the fragmentation and atomization of Jewish life and of the Jewish community; it is to establish a real, legitimate, collective representation of Jewry which will be entitled to speak in the name of the 16 million Jews to the nations and governments of the world, as well as to the Jews themselves' (p. 33).

The Conference elected an Executive Committee, in which Dr. Stephen Wise and Dr. Nahum Goldmann were entrusted with leading positions. During 5-8 September 1933 and 20-23 August 1934 the second and third preparative conferences convened. In the meantime, the rise to power of National Socialism had become the crucial subject at these conferences.

Demands for uncompromising action, calls for the boycott of German goods and services and the rejection of any coexistence were usually based on allegations such as: "World Jewry, not German Jewry, is under attack," therefore this is a "fight for freedom and justice for all races, religions and peoples" (p. 38). Dr. Nahum Goldman was elected President of the Executive Committee.

The World Jewish Congress was founded in Geneva during a convention held 8-15 August 1936. From thirty-two countries, 180 delegates arrived, but none from Germany and none from the Soviet Union.

At the meeting, Dr. Nahum Goldmann analyzed the world situation and concluded that the existing sovereignty of nations should be considered obsolete. However, the idea of the League of Nations should be reinforced to safeguard the interests of the weaker groups in the world:

'Millions of Jews in eastern Europe are being economically expropriated, politically disenfranchised, and physically terrorized in the name of the supremacy of the state and of the dominant nation' (p. 49).

'Where the equal rights of a Jewish community are affected, we are no longer concerned with a regional Jewish question, but with the Jewish question, with a common, worldwide Jewish interest. The surrender of the Jews' equality of rights in any country would mean the surrender of their equality of rights throughout the world.

'Dr. Goldman concluded by linking the Jewish fate with that of humanity itself. We know quite well, he said, that we cannot by ourselves succeed in repelling the attack launched by the Germans upon our right to exist. We can only join forces with the many others in the world who in their own interest must fight against this world menace' (pp. 50-51).

In conclusion, Dr. Goldmann integrated the Jewish destiny with that of the whole of mankind, which "has to fight against this world menace in her own interest - to defend against an aggression, which was started by Germany" (p. 51).

It was emphasized that "fighting against Hitlerism is one of the most important tasks" and that "anti-Semitism must be branded an international crime," that "propaganda is at present one of the main instruments of foreign politics," and that a boycott as well as a confidential international intelligence service were required to be used as political weapons (pp. 56-57). Dr. Stephen Wise became President of the Executive Committee and Dr. Nahum Goldman President of the Administrative Committee. The founding of the World Jewish Congress was to terminate the era of Jewish disunity and uncoordinated action (p. 73).

When World War Two erupted, the WJC's headquarters were moved to Paris, and in July 1940, to New York City. In Geneva, the office continued to exist under the management of Dr. Gerhard Riegner and Dr. Abraham Silberschein; it maintained contacts with the countries occupied by Germany and with the International Red Cross.

The first inter-American conference convened in November 1940, shortly before America's entry into the war, in Baltimore, Maryland. It dealt with plans for the re-integration "of large Jewish masses" in Europe (p. 127).

In 1942, eighteen representative committees for Jewish communities in the countries occupied by Germany were created. Together they formed the Advisory Staff for European Jewish Matters. This amalgamation took place during a meeting on 6-7 June 1942 in the Hotel Commodore in NYC; three hundred delegates attended. At this meeting, which was coordinated with the WJC, a demand was made for the first time that no peace negotiation should ever be carried out without representatives of the WJC participating (p. 131).

On the basis of some preparatory work dating back to April 1939, the 'Institute of Jewish Affairs' was founded on 1 February 1941 in NYC, under the directorship of Dr. Jacob Robinson. Amply provided with a staff of scientists, this institute was assigned the task of gathering information from all parts of the world concerning Jewish affairs and to prepare the Jewish peace program to be submitted to the peace conference after the end of hostilities (pp. 134-136). The Institute did not consider the period from 1919 to 1939 as "peacetime," but as an "armistice" or at most a "post-war situation" (pp. 136-137). As early as 1942, the "punishment of war crimes" had become a central question, and the necessity was stressed that a basis should be created on which crimes could be punished retroactively as from 1933.

The Institute entertained close relations with the Geneva office and the British Section of the WJC in London, particularly after the British Section had built up a research staff of over thirty experts. The Institute compiled a remarkable amount of material in its archives, consisting of thousands of documents, press reports and other material. In these archives there are hundreds of papers, projects, drafts and manuscripts, ready for printing. Part of this material is confidential and will most likely never be published (p. 139).

Some of the most important publications are:

- Zorach Warhaftig, *Starvation over Europe* (1943);
- (no authors named), *Jews in Nazi Europe, Where Shall They Go?* (1941);
- *Hitler's Ten Year War on the Jews* (1943) (this book made a tremendous impression on the Allied governments and served as a basic textbook at the Nuremberg Military Tribunal);
- Jacob Robinson, *Unfinished Victory* (1946);
- Zorach Warhaftig, *Uprooted* (1946);
- Jacob Lestschinsky, *Balance Sheet of Extermination*.

The most important paper transmitted to the American authorities was 'The Conspiracy against the Jewish People,' the main chapters of which were headed:

- I. The Originally Conceived Plan of Extermination of the Jewish People
- II. The Different Stages of the Crime Against the Jewish People
- III. The Responsibility of Individuals and Organizations (translated from the German original).

During 26-30 November 1944 the 'War Emergency Committee' of the WJC convened in Atlantic City, at which 269 delegates coming from forty countries

attended, and for which the Institute of Jewish Affairs had compiled the most essential papers to be discussed, such as:

1. The Jewish migration on the European continent to be expected as a result of the war. The emigration of Jews from Europe to other parts of the world, including mass settlement in Palestine, were discussed, along with the problems of the Jews who could not be repatriated (p. 146).
2. The claims and properties of Jews who have remained without heirs should not be assigned to the respective state – as is general practice – but to the Jewish Representative Organization.
3. Wiedergutmachung and reparations¹ as well as the participation of Jewish representatives in the meetings of large international panels.
4. Jewish claims for future peace settlements and participation therein.

‘In December, 1944, Dr. Kubiwutzki sailed on a mission to the European continent, being the first Jewish emissary from overseas to arrive in Belgium and Switzerland since the outbreak of hostilities, and one of the first to visit France.

‘Direct contact between the British Section and the continent of Europe began in November, 1944’ (pp. 132-133).

For the Allied conference in San Francisco in April 1945, at which the statute of the United Nations (UNO) was voted in, the WJC handed preparative proposals to the representatives of the different nations, until the Charter itself was formulated (p. 147).

A remarkable chapter in *Unity in Dispersion* is the one that deals with the ‘Rescue Attempts’: “From September, 1939 until June 29, 1942, the Jews were the forgotten men of the democratic world” (p. 160).

There was almost no information on the fate of East European Jewry. A first attempt to break this silence was made during the St. James Conference in London in January 1942, when eight exile governments and the National Committee of ‘Free France’ convened for a “discussion on German war crimes.”

‘On January 13, 1942, the Conference issued a declaration branding the reign of terror instituted by Germany in occupied countries, the mass expulsions, the execution of hostages, and the massacres. Not one reference was made to the crimes against the Jews’ (p. 160).

‘On February 18 the Congress made formal representations on this subject to the Conference, asking for a specific statement with reference to the “many and special crimes against the Jews.” It was not until almost three months later that General Wladyslaw Sikorski, President of the Conference, finally replied that a specific reference to the sufferings endured by the Jews “might be equivalent to an implicit recognition of the racial theories which we all reject”’ (pp. 161, 261-262).

Thereupon the British section of the WJC organized on 29 June 1942 its own ‘Conference of the Press of the Free World,’ where the “Facts of a Systematic Extermination of European Jewry” were announced. What “facts” these were is not revealed in the conference minutes. One is therefore forced to rely on a number of general press reports that cannot be checked out and are lacking documentary value. There were, however, immediate reactions in Britain and abroad. The British Broadcasting Corporation transmitted – for the first time – pertaining news, and there were mass demonstrations in the US, which addressed war crimes and the rescue of European Jewry. It was to one of these meetings (Madison Square Gardens, 21 July 1942) that British Prime Minister Winston Churchill sent the following message:

'The Jews were Hitler's first victims, and ever since they have been in the forefront of resistance to Nazi aggression' (p.161).

The WJC commented that "This sentence rightly characterized the Jews of whatever nationality as an allied people of the United Nations" (p. 240).

At the World Jewish Congress in NYC, the then President of this congress, Dr. Chaim Weizmann, stated on 3 December 1942:

'We are not denying and are not afraid to confess that this war is our war and that it is waged for the liberation of Jewry... Stronger than all fronts together is our front, that of Jewry. We are not only giving this war our financial support on which the entire war production is based, we are not only providing our full propaganda power which is the moral energy that keeps this war going. The guarantee of victory is predominantly based on weakening the enemy forces, on destroying them in their own country, within the resistance. And we are the Trojan horses in the enemy's fortress. Thousands of Jews living in Europe constitute the principal factor in the destruction of our enemy. There, our front is a fact and the most valuable aid for victory.'²

In its official document, the WJC neither mentioned any details on the speeches and resolutions of the December 1942 meeting, nor on the meeting as such. However, it can be proven from press reports that the meeting did take place, and Chaim Weizman's speech has been confirmed in its content by an array of facts. Obviously, we are facing here a clear example showing that the present documentation does not contain all the necessary details that are required for historical research to give us an objective judgment of events. It remains as a presentation on Jewry as seen by Jews. It must therefore be supplemented by other documents, including the American government's diplomatic papers.

But even this would not suffice. Dr. Nahum Goldmann refers to other connections:

'This weakness of the President frequently results in failure on the part of the White House to report all the facts to the Senate and the Congress; its description of the prevailing situation is not always absolutely correct and in conformity with the truth...

'When I lived in America, I learned that Jewish personalities - most of them rich donors for the parties - had easy access to the President. They used to contact him over the head of the Foreign Secretary and the representative at the United Nations and other officials. They were often in a position to alter the entire political line by a single telephone conversation...

'Stephen Wise... occupied a unique position not only within American Jewry, but also generally in America.... He was a close friend of Wilson... he was also an intimate friend of Roosevelt and had permanent access to him, a factor which naturally affected his relations to other members of the American Administration....

'The President's car stopped in front of the verandah, and before we could exchange greetings, Roosevelt remarked: "How interesting! Sam Rosenman, Stephen Wise and Nahum Goldmann are sitting there discussing what order they should give to the President of the United States. Just imagine what amount of money the Nazis would pay to obtain a photo of this scene."

'We began to stammer to the effect that there was an urgent message from Europe to be discussed by us, which Rosenman would submit to him on Monday. Roosevelt dismissed him with the words: "This is quite all right. On Monday I shall hear from Sam what I have to do," and he drove on.'³

This should only be understood as an example that is off the record, but may nevertheless be of paramount significance.

Nor is it unimportant to know that Samuel Untermyer, who called for a “holy war” against Germany in 1933,

‘was so close to Roosevelt that his nephew Lawrence Steinhardt became the new US ambassador in Moscow in the fall of 1938, succeeding the President’s friend Joseph Davis. It is customary in American politics, that only the closest friends of the President are normally entrusted with jobs of this importance.’⁴

Equally important, but not mentioned in the diplomatic papers, is certainly the creation of a ‘World Anti-Nazi Council to Fight for Human Rights.’ It was founded in 1936 by Samuel Untermyer together with the British unionist, Sir Walter Critine, to serve as an Agent for “psychological warfare” and – concealed from the public – to be financed by the Jewish Defense Fund. Winston Churchill became one of its activists. And the ideas of the American President F. D. Roosevelt – years before the actual commencement of the war! – about a sea blockade and “quarantine” against “the Dictators” (directed however only against Germany and Japan) in collaboration with Britain which would have to be pressured for this purpose, exposed the world-political dimensions of the engagement of “pressure groups.” Also the catchword of the “rejected coexistence” had been assumed by FDR years before the war.⁴



Henry Morgenthau jr: US Finance Minister who emphatically intervened in favor of a war-like engagement of the United States even before the war in Europe began. Author of the infamous ‘Morgenthau Plan’ unofficially, if not officially, implemented after the defeat of Germany by Dwight D. Eisenhower (see James Bacque, *Other Losses and Crimes and Mercies*).

But we return to the WJC documentation. Inspired by these measures, Great Britain and USA convened the so-called Bermuda Refugee Conference. It seemed that this conference was in fact dealing with the “refugee problem” and not with the rescue of Jews. The representatives of the Jewish

organizations were even refused participation (p. 146). Neither the sending of food into the ghettos nor a liberalization of the immigration policy on the part of the US or Palestine was discussed at this conference.

It was not until 22 January 1944 that a new kind of reaction was heard: President F. D. Roosevelt created the 'War Refugee Board.'

Members were the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury and the Secretary of War. The Director of this panel was Henry Morgenthau's deputy, John W. Pehle. The War Refugee Board was the result of constant encroachment upon the US administration by the WJC. The two continued to be in close contact, and relations between the WJC and the military commands were likewise very good.

'However, it was in vain that it endeavored since June, 1944, to have the instruments of annihilation - the gas chambers, the gas vans, the death baths, the crematoria - attacked in force either by the underground fighters or by Allied paratroopers. Neither did the Congress succeed any better in this respect in its negotiations with the Soviet Embassy, nor were E. Frischer, A. Reiss, and Dr. I Schwarzbart more successful in their conversations with the Czechoslovak and Polish Governments, respectively' (p. 167).

In London, discussions on the bombing of the "extermination chambers" came to nothing. Respective details or documents which might assist in revealing what information was available at the time cannot be found; no names, hours or meeting places are mentioned. This is all the more regrettable, considering that now, forty years later, no pertinent documentation on this vexing subject seems to exist.

'The persistent silence of the Red Cross in the face of the various stages of the extermination policy, of which it was well informed, will remain one of the troubling and distressing riddles of the Second World War' (p. 168).

- although "the greatest pressure" was exercised on the International Red Cross (p. 200).

The World Jewish Congress took several rescue measures into its own hands:

'On June 14, 1940, 14 large cargoes of medical supplies, the first of their kind, were sent from Geneva to the Jewish community in Warsaw. Food packages followed, and a total of over 50,000 such parcels were sent through the Geneva Committee to individuals. Considerable amounts of money were also transmitted during that first period to the territories occupied by the German and Soviet armies and reached the addresses' (p. 202).

At the important Allied war conferences, where the war aims of the USSR, the US and Great Britain were agreed upon and eventually realized by Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill (Teheran Oct.-Nov. 1943, Yalta Feb. 1945 and Potsdam Jul.-Aug. 1945), a Jewish problem was not discussed nor was any Jewish organization heard or took part in the proceedings.

Strong pressure had to be exercised on the US administration in order to obtain from the 21 December 1945 Reparations Conference in Paris at least the creation of a fund to benefit those persons "who had seriously suffered under the Germans." Jews were not mentioned as being special or even as sole beneficiaries. The fund amounted to \$25 million and was to be financed from German assets in neutral states or from the gold stocks found in Germany, provided these were not tied up within the currency system. Only after very intensive endeavors by the Jewish organizations was a final agreement reached

on 14 June 1946; ninety percent of this fund and of the gold reserves, and ninety-five percent of the assets left without heirs, were to be made available to the Jews. But this, too, was tied to practical proposals by Jewish agencies for the resettlement of Jewish war victims (pp. 272-273).

The peace conference which opened in Paris in August 1946, and ended on 10 February 1947 with peace treaties for Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Italy and Rumania, had attracted numerous Jewish organizations. On 20 August 1946 the WJC handed over a written declaration in which it demanded the fulfillment of numerous Jewish claims. The large powers recognized that the "Jews were the victims of racial and religious persecutions" but Jewish delegations were not admitted to the peace conference (p. 257).

'There was a general lack of interest on the part of the non-Jews in those aspects of the Jewish problem which relate to international protection of Jewish rights in the peace treaties' (p. 258).

And this in spite of Stephen Wise's pointed letter that in Versailles 1919 the committee of Jewish delegations had been heard by the panels of the peace conference and that a "non admission at this time constitutes a serious break with a long tradition" (p. 258).

In conclusion, yet another chapter of *Unity in Dispersion* dealing with the tracing department of the WJC – the Location Service – may be of some importance. It was founded in New York in the second half of 1942 and coordinated with similar facilities in Buenos Aires, Geneva and Stockholm. The tracing department in London did not begin to operate until 1 March 1945.

Since 1942, the New York Location Service received more than 150,000 letters of inquiry and about 25,000 families were reunited. The London office located 24,629 lost persons during the period 1 March 1945 – 31 December 1947; 200,000 letters were exchanged, probably including the letters of acknowledgment and gratitude and the many inquiries as to changes of location.

'Summarizing the work of the Congress in this field it may be said that its offices handled over 275,000 inquiries about missing Jews. Nearly 85,000 were traced and some 50,000 survivors were reunited with members of their families in all parts of the world' (p. 298).

Since search inquiries addressed to Jewish organizations in different countries have remained essentially unanswered, and due to the fact that non-Jewish organizations, such as the Red Cross, were not adequately equipped to meet these demands (p. 299), these searches were necessarily concentrated on the WJC offices. The figures indicated here may therefore be considered a documentary proof that the number of search reports between 1942 and 1948 was not higher.

NOTES

1. Nana Sagi, *Wiedergutmachung für Israel* (Reparation for Israel) Stuttgart 1981, p. 27. Professor Nana Sagi confirms in this official investigation that the resolution made in

Atlantic City with respect to reparations had been submitted to the Allied governments on 27 October 1944, with the following text:

'Jewish claims for compensation must be based on the recognition of the fact that the Jews belong to a nation which has been in a state of war with Germany since 1933.'

2. Archiv Peter, Colburg: D. H. T. chapter: The participation of the Jews in the Second World War and their co-responsibility for the final solution of the Jewish question.
3. Nahum Goldmann, *Mein Leben - USA, Europa, Israel* (München 1981), pp. 53, 66-67, 116.
4. Dirk Bavendamm, *Roosevelts Weg zum Krieg* (München - Berlin 1983), p. 310, 1956.

From Udo Walendy, *The Transfer Agreement and the Boycott Fever 1933*, Verlag für Volkstum und Zeitgeschichtsforschung, Vlotho/Weser, 1987

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